

STATEMENT OF
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LEGISLATION
U.S.D.A. FOREST SERVICE

Before the
Subcommittee on
National Parks, Historic Preservation, and Recreation
Committee on Energy and Natural Resources
United States Senate

Concerning: H.R. 1749, Proposed Designation of Wilson Creek, North Carolina, as a
Component of the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System

April 27, 2000

2:30 p.m.

366 Dirksen Senate Office Building

CHAIRMAN AND MEMBERS OF THE SUBCOMMITTEE:

Thank you for the opportunity to be here today and present the Administration's views concerning H.R. 1749, a bill to designate a 23.3 mile segment of Wilson Creek, North Carolina as part of the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System.

The Administration supports enactment of H.R. 1749 designating 23.3 miles of Wilson Creek in Avery and Caldwell Counties, North Carolina, as a component of the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System. The wild, scenic and recreational river corridor would generally extend ¼ mile from the ordinary high water mark on each side, running the length of the river. Within the corridor is 9.9 miles of national forest system lands, 0.6 miles of Blue Ridge Parkway and 12.8 miles of private lands. Detailed boundaries of the entire river corridor will be prepared in accordance with the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act within a year of the river's designation.

The outstandingly remarkable values of the Wilson Creek corridor include scenery, recreation, geology, fish and wildlife, botanical communities, and historic and cultural sites. Wilson Creek was identified on the 1982 Nationwide River Inventory (National Park Service) for potential inclusion in the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System. In 1987, the Final Environmental Impact Statement for the Nantahala and Pisgah National Forests Land and Resource Management Plan determined Wilson Creek eligible for designation.

In December 1998, members of the Caldwell County Commission expressed interest in pursuing Wild and Scenic River designation for Wilson Creek. County interests include long term protection for the Creek, prohibition of dams and diversions, increased public awareness of the Creek's values, and a framework for managing issues such as sewage discharge, trespass, and overuse of recreation sites. County interests are consistent with Forest Service management objectives for the corridor.

After receiving much public comment in favor of designation from several public meetings in both Caldwell and Avery Counties, the County Commissioners have passed resolutions in support of designation. Avery County passed its resolution March 29, 1999 and Caldwell County passed its April 19, 1999. County staff estimates 85-90% of landowners within the study corridor were contacted about Wild and Scenic River status. The County received verbal comments in support and one letter of concern. The one concern was specifically addressed in the proposed legislation.

This concludes my statement. I would be happy to answer any questions you and the members of the subcommittee might have.